



Identity and Development: Becoming Who You Are Called to Be

Unique in All the World

Fifteen years ago, about four and a half billion people lived on this global village we call earth. Men, women, boys, girls—four and a half billion human beings with dreams, fears, loves, hates, hang-ups, and hopes. Those billions of people do not include all the human beings who lived on this earth throughout human history and for the thousands of years before history was recorded.

More than fifteen years ago, two of those billions of people, each with her or his own special history, crossed paths on a particular day and at a particular place. Out of all the people in the world, they were drawn together. This man and this woman began a relationship and a history unique to them. Against the backdrop of their shared history, they celebrated their union of spirits by becoming one in body as well.

When that man and that woman joined in sexual intercourse, literally millions of possibilities were present. In one act of sexual intercourse, the man shared millions of sperm cells with the woman—any one of which might have united with one of her hundreds of eggs, or all of which might have died after a short time. Yet one of those sperm cells survived—one unique from all the others in its potential and its characteristics. That one sperm cell united with one of the woman's equally unique eggs, and the miracle of human creation began.

In This Chapter . . .

Unique in All the World
The Journey of Your Life
This Course and Your Journey
A Question at the Heart
of the Journey
Your "Gifts and Givens"

**Adolescence: Journeying from
Childhood to Adulthood**
Scenes from the Journey
Dramatic Changes at Every Level
of Life
We Are More Than Our Body
Crucial Tasks of Adolescence
Full of Longings

Finding Answers to Life's Longings
Society's "Answers"
The Need to Be Critical
New Questions

Our Heart Is Restless

1

Have you been told about your origins—about how your parents met, the circumstances of your coming into the world, the day or night you were born? If you were adopted and do not know about your biological parents, have you been told about the day you came to live with your family? Write about any stories you have been told.



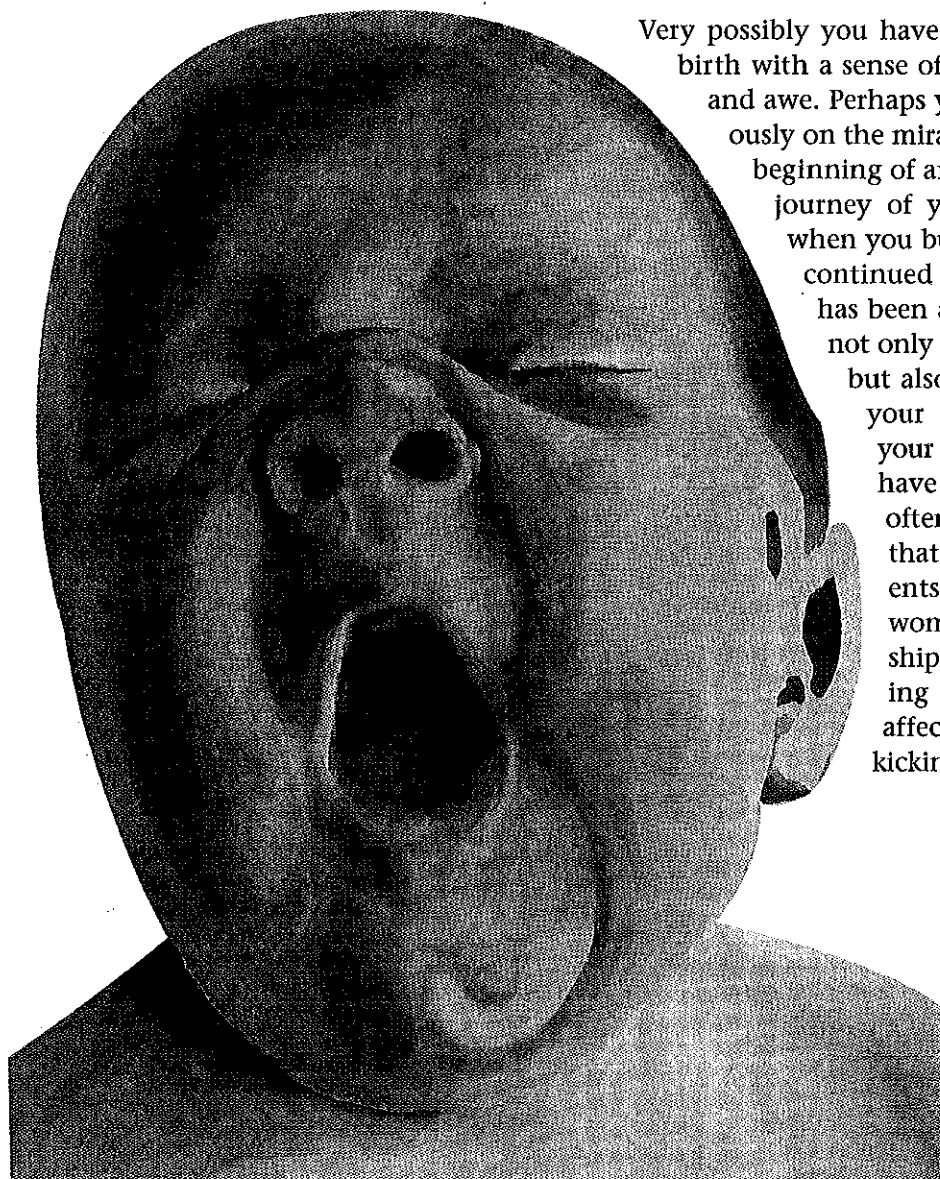
Nine months or so later, a new human being entered the world—a new human being that shared many of the characteristics of the billions who came before it. Yet this person was distinct, different, unique. Never before had the world seen anyone exactly like this human being. Never before had this special combination of genes and chromosomes, this combination of blood and bone, this wonderful potential of talent and gift, been born. Never again in the future of the world would that miracle be precisely repeated.

That indescribable mystery of some fourteen years ago, that nearly unimaginable wonder, that never-to-be-repeated moment, was the birth of someone very special—you.

The Journey of Your Life

Very possibly you have never thought of your own birth with a sense of drama or a sense of wonder and awe. Perhaps you have never reflected seriously on the miracle of birth as being only the beginning of an equally amazing story—the journey of your life. Since the moment when you burst into the world, you have continued the process of growth. And it has been a total process, during which not only your body has been changing but also your mind, your emotions, your attitudes, your values, and your relationships with others. You have continued, for example, the often difficult process of defining that relationship with your parents that began in your mother's womb. Included in this relationship is the conflict between wanting and needing protection and affection while, at the same time, kicking to be free of restrictions.

Each human being comes into the world distinct, different, unique.
Student art: "Little Boy Blue,"
watercolor painting by David
Christianson, Sacred Heart
High School, Kingston,
Massachusetts





Outside the family you have also been confronted through the years with new experiences, new challenges, new feelings. Many ideas you accepted unquestioningly before, you may now either reject or seriously challenge. Perhaps life has not been easy for you. And as you enter adulthood, life will not soon get easier. Yet like all the great journeys we learn of in history and literature, it is precisely the challenges, the dangers, and even the pain that make the journey of life such a grand adventure.

This Course and Your Journey

As you grow through adolescence, a significant part of your journey will be to look at the deeper meaning of life, to wrestle honestly with questions you probably never thought about or took for granted when you were younger.

Perhaps you were raised in a family that faithfully practiced Catholicism. You learned certain prayers and religious customs; you attended Mass with your family and made your first Communion. Maybe you went to a Catholic grade school or a parish religious education program, where you learned about the sacraments and beliefs of the church. You may not have had a lot of questions about religion because you just accepted what you were taught.

However, the understandings you had about God and your religion from childhood were likely quite limited—probably a mixed bag of some truth, some confused notions, some genuine understanding, and perhaps some humorous misunderstandings. Mixed-up religious ideas you might carry from childhood are not necessarily the fault of your parents or religious educators but simply the result of your

2

Find four photos of yourself, one taken recently and three from younger ages. For the "you" in each photo, describe in writing a memory you have (or have been told) that expresses what you were like at each age.



3

If you are Catholic and have celebrated your first Communion, try to locate a photo of yourself on that occasion. Recall what you felt on that day. Then write a paragraph comparing your attitude toward religion at the time of your first Communion with what you feel about it now.



4

Recall images of God or religious beliefs held by young children that now seem humorous to you. Draw upon your own childhood as well as that of other children you know. Briefly describe a couple of these humorous images in writing.



being too young then to understand the deeper issues of faith as adolescents and adults can.

Simple answers are all right for little kids, but they will not be accepted by teenagers, who need and deserve the chance to go deeper. Adolescence is the time in one's life journey when the old childhood notions of God and religion can be examined, and the questions and struggles about faith that never seemed to crop up in childhood can be wrestled with. If you have been brought up in the Catholic tradition, this course can serve that purpose for you, helping you gradually replace childhood knowledge with a more mature understanding of your faith.

Possibly you were baptized and raised Catholic, but you are at a point of uncertainty about this faith, and you question everything—the church's teachings and practices, or even the very existence of God. Know that your questions, offered in a spirit of openness and sincerity, are welcome in this course. A sincere search for truth, guided by God's grace, ultimately will lead to truth.



You may not have been raised Catholic, but because you are attending Catholic high school, you may be required to take this course. May this course be an opportunity for you to learn, in a mature and open way, about the faith tradition of the school you and your family have chosen for you. This course has been designed with awareness of, and respect for, other religious traditions. It is not the intent of this course to convert non-Catholic students to Catholicism, but to give everyone, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, the chance at least to understand what the Catholic heritage is all about.

5

In a one-page essay, answer this question: *Why are you taking this course, and how do you feel about it?*



A Question at the Heart of the Journey

A fundamental question related to the Catholic heritage you are about to study has to do with our very existence. Have you ever wondered, “*Why* am I here at all?” Why are you, in all your uniqueness, living on earth anyway? Let’s look briefly at two distinct answers.

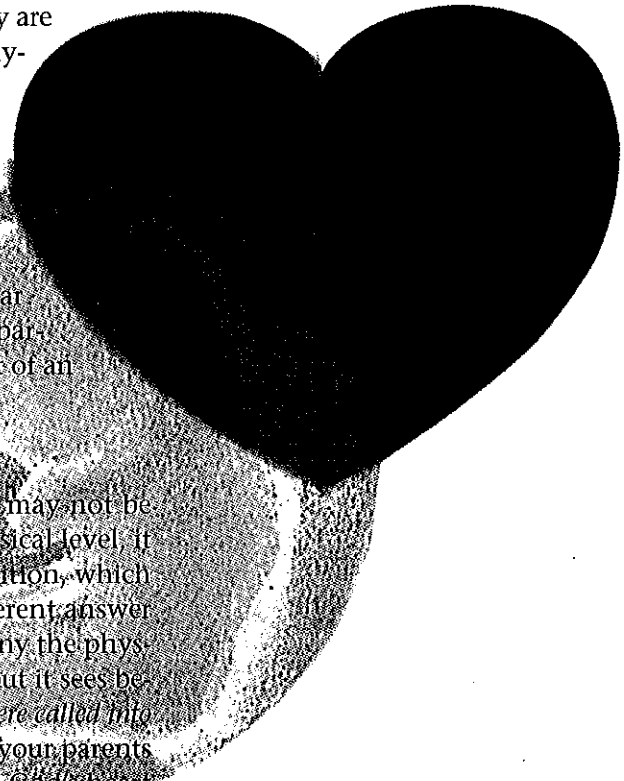
Just an Accident

One way to answer that question is to say, “Look, there’s no mystery about it. I was just the product of a random series of events and coincidences, including that this one particular sperm happened to get together with this one particular egg. So here I am. No big deal. It was sort of an accident that I happened at all.”

Called into Being by God

The answer that life is merely an accident may not be very satisfying, but at one level, the purely physical level, it is correct. However, the Catholic Christian tradition, which you will study in this course, offers a very different answer to the question of why you exist. It does not deny the physical explanation of things (how you got here), but it sees beyond that to a much deeper kind of why: *You were called into being by God*. You are not an accident (whether your parents planned to have you or not)! You have been in God’s heart from all eternity, until God called you into existence some fifteen years ago when you were conceived in your mother’s womb. God called you into existence out of love for you, and God longs for your love in return. You were created to live in union with God in this life and forever, even beyond death.

And that is the awesome, mysterious reason you are here.



6 What are the gifts and givens in your life? In a paragraph, summarize what has been given to you as part of your heritage or background.



Your "Gifts and Givens"

Yes, you were born with a unique set of chromosomes, which determines a lot about your body and even your intellect and emotions. And you were situated in a particular family, neighborhood, race, culture, religion, and economic class. You have certain talents and opportunities, as well as certain struggles and limitations, because of your background. These are the "gifts and givens" of your life—things you did not choose or do not have control over. They are the "raw materials" you have to work with, to become who God is calling you to be. Your **identity** is what you have become at any point in time as a result of choosing what to do with what you have been given. God created you knowing that you would have some special gifts to share with the world, something that no one else in all of history could offer because no other human being is just like you. Life is a journey of gradually discovering unique gifts one has to offer, embracing them, developing them, and sharing them with others.

Your life is God's gift to you. What you do with your life is your gift to God.

To begin our study of the Catholic faith and how you relate to it, let's look at where you are in your development. You are in the period of adolescence, the crucial years in a life's journey when a person moves from being a child to being an adult.



For Review

- What is the intent of this course?
- According to the Catholic Christian vision, why are you here on earth?
- What are the types of givens that are part of everyone's life? How do they relate to what God is calling each person to be?

